The Lesson

BY ELEANOR M. INGRAM.

HE sat, his folded arms resting on the table, gazing down at the papers, as he had sat since midnight. Then the lamps had glowed bravely over the somber richness of the room; over carved and gilded leather, dull velvets and shining wood; now the chill pink radiance of winter dawn sucked all the splendor of light to itself and left the artificial rivals mere streaks of yellow flame. But by either St. Allien's expression showed unchanged: set in locked exultation, the exhaustion of triumph and attainment.

The music from the chapel below, that had flowed around his thoughts all night, rose suddenly to a glorious burst of rejoicing that swept into his mood and sent the dark color over his face. He shook himself with decision, smiling not gently, and took up the pen awaiting his fingers.

It was as if the pleasure were too great to be lightly grasped; with the wet pen poised over the paper, he stopped and laid it down.

"The one emotion that pays the cost of living," he told himself. "To hate, and *win.*"

"*Gloria in excelsis*——" sang the sweet boy voices below. "*Gloria*——"

He rose and walked to the window, looking out over the snowy city rose-tinted by the dawn. His still, rather cold face hardened yet more in its meditative content, its conscious victory.

There was only one person who came at will and unbidden into this room; when the latch clicked St. Allien spoke without turning:

"Enter, *mon père;* you come in a good hour."

"A late one, my son," answered the firm old voice. "All night we have kept the festival in the chapel—as you have not done. It is fitting, surely, that you come now, at least."

"Pardon, I have kept the *réveillon* also; as I shall never keep another. This one is to be remembered all my life, to be carried after death to my father and his father; to all those of my house who have lived since that trick. You too have lived it; come look as I do on the dawn of the long rest; I have won."

The priest stood quite still, but he made a quick sign and paled slightly.

"Won?" he echoed.

"I have won"—all self-control could not keep the thrill from the level tones. "When I write my name on that paper over there, I have the old title to add to the new and my cousin has—nothing. Louis consents."

"I came to ask you to the chapel," the other said harshly. "I was wrong; you have no place there to-day."

Amazed, the man at the window wheeled to survey the dignified figure in the flowing robes of office.

"Mon père——"

The heavy chords of the organ rolled between, the chant rippled over their words.

"No place. You claim *this* for your day, you dare watch *this* dawn. You will sign that paper to-day; your thirty-second birthday and Christmas! Hush, let me speak; I have never done so before nor may I again, and your pride has no place with me. I do know the story; I was a young boy in the château when your grandfather played that game and lost, I followed your father's lifelong struggle, I have witnessed you carry it on. I watched violence and hate and shifting wrong, until you came with your concentrated youth, your marvelous tact and skill, to gather the floating skeins and weave them into the fabric you desired. Have you looked at that work of yours?"

The other lifted his head, his gray eyes crossed those opposite without a change in their repose.

"I looked at it as you entered; and I am proud."

"You looked at the smooth surface; have you studied the warp and woof? Noel de Chartrès, Duc de St. Allien, noble of France and favorite of the king, with the right to wear a dozen jeweled orders of chivalry, has devoted his life to wresting from his poor and obscure cousin the old title of their house. Alone on this morning, he faces this, not only unashamed, but proud."

St. Allien moved then, flushing scarlet at the biting rebuke.

"My father, you forget many things. I right a wrong, not commit one; I resume my own. The work was mine; born with me, taught to me, a heritage and trust."

Père Cyprian regarded him steadily. "Let us be frank. You were indeed taught a hatred; you have done this simply because you hate the cousin you have never seen. You have no higher motive than that."

"Gloria, Gloria——" rose the monotonous chorus; the pink light deepened ruddily.

"And you have no just cause. Not even of nature, for you are not cruel or merciless outside of this one purpose. Go sign your paper; I did not hope to stop you. But do not come to the chapel."

"You——"

"Pardon, I have the power to forbid you that."

"You have a reason for saying this."

"Yes, I love you. I do not waste the warning of punishment upon one of your race, but I say you have a lesson to learn here or hereafter. And I would have you commence, my son."

The unexpectedness staggered St. Allien for an instant; the other turned and went out.

On the hearth the fire crackled subduedly, to the organ tones joined the chorus of bells from the city churches; bells silver, bells iron, bells that plead and bells that commanded, bells greeting the day joyously or solemnly according to their natures. The light in the room became vivid shimmering crimson as the sun crept up to the horizon.

"So much for a night of wakefulness," shrugged St. Allien, and went to the table.

But after taking his seat, he did not sign. Instead he again rested his folded arms on the table and gazed down at the papers.

Punishment? It was perfectly true that he would have accepted the threat merely as a challenge. But suppose it were true that to win this battle he was throwing away all else, even the power to distinguish between right and wrong? Suppose there did exist other emotions strong as hate while less bitter? Last year young Honoré Belfontaine had shot himself for love; last week Marcel d'Armagnac had come back to Paris, his girlish beauty gone forever, but supremely happy because he had succeeded in nursing his brother

through the smallpox before taking it himself. Some people lived that way.

He shook his head impatiently and took up the pen, the fine black brows contracting above his gray eyes. There was no feeling better recognized than this, he told himself coldly; the poverty of attainment in comparison with the struggle, the reactionary indifference. Only—he did not like to think that this cousin whom he was about to strike was perhaps poor, in want.

The music continued, beating down thought with its sweetness, its exultation crossed with premonitory loss.

After a time the door opened and softly closed. The golden sunbeams tangled themselves in Père Cyprian's dazzling robes.

"Will you come to the chapel?" he asked gently.

St. Allien did not move or raise his eyes.

"I have been too severe," the other said again. "Will you come to the chapel? 'Peace on earth——' It is no day for condemnation."

"'And because of the day you were born we called you Noel,'" quoted St. Allien dreamily. "Was it you who told me that, *mon père?*"

Père Cyprian regarded him, startled.

"Not I, my son. It was your mother, who died when you were five years old. A very gentle lady; she said always that Christmas was your day of days."

"I am going on a journey of some weeks—into the country. You say my cousin is not rich?"

"I have heard so; indeed it must be. But——"

St. Allien rose.

"It marks a very great epoch when one stops to think. Will you say good-by, *mon père?*"

"You go like this!" The keen old eyes swept the room. "You leave your —papers?"

"The papers are not yet signed," returned St. Allien, with a chill repelling of comment.

He again rested his folded arms on the table and gazed down at the papers.

The road was very narrow, narrowed now more than usual by the snow banked on either side. Precisely as two men will do on a city walk, the riders involuntarily reined in the same direction, and as mutually correcting the error, again brought themselves face to face.

The one going east drew in his horse sharply, almost defiantly; his thin high-bred face flushing. The one going west forced his reluctant mount into the drift and bared his head in courteous salute.

"Pardon, I believe the right of way is yours," he said, his level voice carrying the ease of one too sure of himself for false dignity.

Taken by surprise, the other returned the salute.

"You are courteous, monsieur," he responded, and rode on.

Both had gray eyes, and in passing the gray eyes lingered together with a curious pleasure and friendliness, as if in some vague recognition. A few rods farther on, the rider going west glanced over his shoulder.

"How far to the château, Michel?"

he demanded of the servant who followed.

"Monseigneur, according to the peasants, a scant mile."

"If that should be he," mused St. Allien.

The sky was massed with driving clouds; during the next mile the snow closed in and the first view of the château was across the whirling flakes. Old, dun-gray, somber, the building loomed through the storm; it stood with a certain massive feebleness, a desolate age, among its vacant courtyards and frozen moats.

The horses' hoofs echoed blankly as they entered the broken gate. A dull, heavy-faced peasant came out, staring, to meet them.

"This is the Château de Chartrès?" St. Allien asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Monsieur de Chartrès is at home?"

"Monseigneur has ridden out. If monsieur will go in——"

Michel had already flung himself off, and held his master's horse with a rigid respect that chained the peasant's wondering attention. St. Allien dismounted and went alone up the broad steps.

"Enter," called a clear young voice at his knock.

Coloring, she let him raise her fingers to his lips.

He obeyed, and found himself in the huge, medieval hall. A fire snapped and roared on the hearth, the aromatic perfume of burning wood enfolded him, and down the room moved a girl; straight, slim, her glistening brown hair piled high on her small head, her large gray eyes upon the guest.

St. Allien took one step forward, and stood still. He had never known that he had two cousins, but he knew it now. He felt the shock of recognition, the leap of kindred blood to hers, and the fierce rewakening of a passion older than himself. And he knew that she felt it also, as she stopped wordlessly before him.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "mademoiselle——"

Flavienne de Chartrès looked at him. All her life had been meager, bare, stern; as the château was without, so was it within. Only in dim rebellious imaginings had she conceived a visitor like this one come out of the storm; this tall stately man whose dark face burned vivid with untested capacities for emotion, whose compelling gray eyes sank into hers and drew to him a self she scarcely knew. And because she had been starved of such things, she delighted in the dark richness of his dress as the firelight flickered across it, the luster of fur, the frosty tracery of lace.

"Mademoiselle," he said again, "if I disturb you, let me offer in excuse that I have ridden many miles to see the Seigneur de Chartrès. Dare I ask permission to wait for him?"

"Monsieur, my brother would not forgive me if I allowed you to depart," she answered. "He will return this afternoon. Until then, if I may be your hostess—— I am Flavienne de Chartrès."

She did not extend her hand, too unaccustomed to such gallantries, but St. Allien's gesture was unmistakable and, coloring, she let him raise her fingers to his lips.

"Mademoiselle, you are most gracious. I," a sudden fancy dictated the statement, "I am called Noel, a gentleman in the king's service."

"I guessed you of the court, Monsieur Noel. Our house has fallen from the old days, but we remember——" She broke off and turned to the chair from which she had risen on his entrance.

St. Allien laid aside his cloak, his glance traveling over the lofty hall and all its mutely endured poverty. Even Flavienne's trailing black dress was worn and faded; the nunlike severity strangely appealing after the butterfly gorgeousness of Paris. Already shaken out of himself by the emotions of the last few days, the place and his errand swept him farther yet. He took a seat opposite her and again their gray eyes met and tangled.

"Just this hour has left me on your hearth, mademoiselle, the next may carry me as far apart," he said with his meditative tranquillity. "Why should we speak of what we do not think? I have come to change all things here, if I can, as in the last week all things have changed for me. All my life has been a struggle, a war toward one end, and suddenly all has fallen into a hush. The battle is over; may I say that until now I saw nothing beyond?"

Her breath quickened, the same curious pleasure in his possession of all she had not known prompted the anxiety of her question:

"You lost?"

"No, I won," he smiled faintly. "But the victory failed me. All this battle, all this struggle of my life has been against a fancied enemy; only a week ago did I find the true one."

Flavienne regarded him earnestly.

"Each has his enemy," she answered, and the rattle of the storm followed her silver voice. "We also. Ours—wins. Look around you, monsieur; you see the stamp of our defeat. But you, you breathe accustomed mastery, yet you are tired. The struggle, always the struggle."

"I am not more tired than humbled, mademoiselle. My enemy has governed me unawares; dwelt with me, slept by me, followed me at home and abroad. He has made me support an unworthy cause, toil in a mine of dark plans and winding thoughts to which the sun never reached; he shut me from the beauty of life. And all the while I believed him strong and wise and just."

Fascinated by the picture, the quiet intensity of its painting, she leaned forward.

"You are noble, of the court, monsieur; to do that to you he must be most powerful. He is, the king?"

"No, mademoiselle; I am afraid I fancied him greater than the king he influenced. His name is St. Allien."

"Chartrès de St. Allien?" she cried. "Monsieur, you mean the Duc de St. Allien?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

She flung out her hands with a sweeping gesture, her face sparkling into white fire.

"Now I know why you have come! Why you think to change our lives. You have come to league my brother against our common enemy, to crush the one who has crushed us all. St. Allien, St. Allien—all my life his shadow has been upon us. St. Allien's power, St. Allien's wealth, St. Allien's statesmanship and influence over the king—until the iteration stunned me into submission. And why, monsieur? Because the twin brothers, his grandfather and ours, played a game of cards for the title and château; and his ancestor, losing, refused to keep the bargain."

He flushed angrily, aroused.

"Mademoiselle, the elder brother lost to the younger and duly resigned to him the name and estate of Seigneur de Chartrès. Not until discovering that the cards had been marked cheats, did he reclaim his own."

"It is not so; that was a pretext."

"Regnier de Chartrès confessed."

"It is not so. You, a stranger, think to know! Oh, and *you* defend St. Allien?"

He bit his lip, but compelled a smile to meet her wrathful amazement.

"Pardon, I told you we had been friends; the old habit of defense clings. And perhaps you are hardly just; this last St. Allien would have let the game

stand if he himself had played and lost."

"Then, why——"

"Mademoiselle, when Chartrès lost all to his brother, he stepped penniless into the world. He was very near starvation when he learned of the marked cards. He fought his way, soldier, courtier, until he drew out of the black waters and stood firm. Dying years later, he passed on to his son the story, the hate, and the new title of St. Allien given by a grateful king. That son passed the triple heritage, increasing with the years, to his own son; the Chartrès de St. Allien of whom you speak. I do not excuse him, but he believed himself regaining his own."

Dominated in spite of herself by his manner, Flavienne locked her fingers together and turned her head to the leaping fire.

"You said that you hated him, Monsieur Noel."

"Pardon; I said he had done me much wrong, which I shall force him to repair."

"You can force *him?*"

"Please God," said St. Allien reverently.

The snow and sleet hissed against the window-panes, the wind flung itself whining upon the old walls and pushed slender white drifts beneath the doors like the clutching fingers of the storm. The anger and tempest died out of the girl's delicate face; she glanced frequently at St. Allien as he watched the flames, and reveled secretly in his stateliness, the occasional glint of jeweled clasp or ring, and the faint exotic perfume of his garments. He had purposely come simply dressed, according to his standards; but he had been reared in the most luxurious court of a luxurious age.

A pair of old servants, man and woman, entered presently and began to lay a table at the other end of the hall.

"We dine here," Flavienne explained, cold with pride. "It is warmer."

St. Allien recovered himself abruptly and for the first time his suddenly bright smile flashed unexpectedly across his face.

"You are most generous in your hospitality, mademoiselle. A stranger, I scarcely ventured to hope such grace as your presence."

She looked at him, her bosom still heaving as he rose and ceremoniously offered his hand to lead her to the table. The thought in her heart was of the double dreariness of the château after he should have passed from it.

As if the very meagerness of the meal imposed a duty of gaiety upon the guest, he tossed aside his gravity with the ease of practise and bent himself to amuse Flavienne. It was the pleasure-loving king's beloved St. Allien who dined at the château; who swept the eager girl into his world with vivid story and description, airy wit and pungent comment. Wide-eyed, forgetting or disdaining to eat, she listened greedily.

Only once at the beginning of the dinner, his real seriousness had showed briefly. He had broken a fragment of bread and laid beside it on his plate a little salt.

"An Oriental custom, mademoiselle," he said gravely. "I shall not forget the hospitality of the château."

She had smiled vaguely, indifferently, and idly quoted the motto of her own house.

"'A Chartrès to remember;' nor will the château forget, monsieur."

His eyes fell. Yes, they remembered, the Chartrès; remembered an injury, a hate, a love.

They lingered long at table. The old servants had disappeared, and in the solitude that strange preknowledge drew them closer, united their thoughts, their glances. St. Allien's gaiety flickered into silence, Flavienne's curling lashes drooped slumberously.

Suddenly one—they scarcely realized which—stirred; the other looked up, and they rose simultaneously. St. Allien made a step forward, Flavienne swayed dizzily, passive before him—then she was lying on his breast and his head was bent over hers.

"I love you," he said, and said it for the first time in his absorbed life. "I

love you, I have wanted you. Somewhere we loved each other——"

She lay still, her head on his arm, her eyes open to his; eyes unquestioning, mystic, unafraid.

The footfall of the returning servant broke in upon them. He bent his head still lower and kissed her, then they moved back to the chairs on either side of the hearth.

While the servants were present there could be no open speech; after St. Allien's last words they would stoop to no lesser subject. Flavienne leaned back, her small hands folded in her lap, the firelight quivering into roseate aureoles around her. St. Allien watched her, all the unused passion of a lifetime in his steady gaze.

"When I take you to Paris," he said after a while, his low tones shielded by the uproar of the storm, "it must be as my wife; and the king absolutely requires my return by the twelfth. This afternoon is our time of betrothal, this evening I seek a priest. Let me take your hand, beloved of mine."

She held it out unresistingly, unresentful of his possession. Smiling, he kissed the soft fingers and released them.

"Pardon, your left hand; so——" He drew a ring from his own least finger. "It is too large; in the first city we pass I will replace it. But I would bind you now."

"I am bound, from some lost age," she murmured, and her glance caressed the ruby that stained her hand.

Silence again. The servants ended their task and withdrew. Louder than ever the wind sobbed and fretted in the chimney.

"I remember," St. Allien mused aloud, "once the king urged me to marry, and I told him I had no leisure. Now, I have space for no other thought. This was the reason for living, Flavienne; to find you. So gentle my lesson, after all——"

The clatter of muffled hoofs in the snow, a sharp phrase of command, rang from the court; the door was flung open and a gust of icy wind rushed in with the arrival.

"Armand!" exclaimed Flavienne eagerly, rising to spring toward him. "Armand——"

Her clear voice broke with its burden of gladness and feverish excitement, but her brother did not heed, his blazing gray eyes on St. Allien.

"Your guest, Flavienne?" he inquired harshly.

"We met in the forest this morning, monsieur," St. Allien interposed, coming forward. "You will forgive my ignorance of my host, since I came from Paris to meet him."

Chartrès tossed his snow-laden hat and gloves to a chair, his glance never leaving the other. His young face was worn, almost haggard beneath its surface fire.

"My servant tells me you are called Monsieur Noel," he said. "Your own man spoke of you as 'Highness,' just now. And you look, you look—who are you, monsieur?"

St. Allien stood unmoved under the other's scrutiny.

"I am Noel de Chartrès, my cousin," he answered equably.

Flavienne cried out, and sank wordlessly against a chair.

"You dare!" said Chartrès with a concentrated passion beyond all description. "You dare come here! St. Allien, this time you pay."

"I think so, but not the way you mean. My cousin, I come in search of peace; why should we destroy each other for a feud scarcely our own?"

"It is a lie. You have come here to take possession of the title won at last. I learned to-day that the weak king has granted it you."

St. Allien flushed, but held his composure.

"You are not careful in your choice of words, my cousin. The papers the king would give me are unsigned in my desk, and will remain so always."

"You ask me to believe that? That you have not made your life one long intrigue, a tangled mesh of scheming plots to compass this? Look about you, St. Allien, and tell me I do not know this desolation is left because we have stripped ourselves fragment by frag-

ment to support our war of defense. You speak of peace!"

As before at Flavienne's bidding, St. Allien's glance passed over the somber hall, and looking he learned his first humility.

"You are right," he acknowledged. "But I did not know, Chartrès; not this. I fought for the title, no more, and not until a week ago did I guess you had not still the old wealth."

"Would it have made a difference if you had?" he interrupted bitingly.

It would not have done so, and St. Allien knew it.

"We can hate, we of this blood," was his indirect confession. "And you, my cousin, who have given all for your name, should understand why my kin fought for it and held this new title of St. Allien valueless beside the right to sign Seigneur de Chartrès. But I yield it to you and am content; let the old enmity die. I am sincere; let us have peace."

They looked fully at each other for a long moment.

"If you could hate," Chartrès said deliberately, "who have stepped from triumph to triumph, victory to victory, think how I can hate who have borne defeat and bitterness and the stinging shame of poverty. Two years ago I went to Paris, to protest to the king against this outrage. He was too busy to receive me, playing cards, and I waited two hours in an anteroom among the sneering lackeys. When at last the door opened and I rose, I was waved back imperiously to make way for his highness the Duc de St. Allien; who passed by me splendid in velvets and jewels and merrily declaring to a friend that he had just lost a hundred louis to the king. Oh, yes, I have learned to hate. You will tell me dueling is out of fashion, but nevertheless you will fight with me and I will kill you—as I have dreamed of that at night for ten years."

Flavienne gave a sob of utter horror as her brother advanced a pace. St. Allien stood immovably, his hands lightly clasped behind him, his eyes unfaltering and concerned.

"I never knew you were in Paris, of that at least I am guiltless, Chartrès. If you were put aside for me, I am sorry and apologize. And I will not fight with you, my kinsman and host. Come, grant me wrong, and forgive me. I love your sister; give me the honor of making her my wife and let us learn friendship."

"Flavienne?" her brother cried, wheeling fiercely upon her. "Flavienne?"

St. Allien moved swiftly between.

"Mademoiselle knew nothing of me; I gave her a false name. Simply she showed me hospitality for a noon, and I loved her. She knew nothing."

Chartrès walked to the great door and flung it open, admitting a violent blast of snowy wind.

"If you are too cowardly to fight, go," he commanded, suffocating with wrath. "Go, St. Allien, and go in safety because I am too dainty for personal assassination. I tell you in sober truth that if I had two sturdy peasant followers, you would either fight or I would have you killed in the forest road. I hate you as—a Chartrès can. Take my title on your return; I refuse to hold it from your bounty. Go."

The snow drove hissing down the hall, the fire leaped high on the hearth. St. Allien calmly took his cloak from its chair and saluted his host.

"You could never stop my course in the past, my cousin," he retorted. "You cannot evade my future will. Seigneur de Chartrès you are and will remain."

He turned, and his straight gaze compelled the girl's.

"Will you come with me, mademoiselle?" he asked tenderly.

Chartrès remained perfectly silent. Colorless, drained of all physical strength, Flavienne looked across the storm-swept hall into St. Allien's eyes.

"No," she answered, never more clearly, "I stay here, monsieur, as is right. But I shall think of this day always—'A Chartrès to remember.'"

He bowed to her formally.

"I am a Chartrès also; I have called you my wife, mademoiselle."

Chartrès still held back the door, careless of the bitter cold. In passing St. Allien lingered.

"When we met in the forest this morning, no instinct bade you hate me, my cousin," he urged quietly.

"You tricked me into a friendly glance, Monsieur le Duc; the last. I did not recognize you."

St. Allien met the hard eyes with his brief warm smile.

"Perhaps, monseigneur. But after all the blood calls."

Just one man in Paris received any idea of where St. Allien had been, on his return.

"You have not yet claimed my signature to your new-old title, Noel," the king remarked to his favorite.

"Sire, my cousin and I have abandoned the feud. With your indulgence the title shall rest."

"*You* to forget a feud!"

"Sire, perhaps I pursue it differently."

"That is more credible, *mon ami*."

But if St. Allien pursued an object, it lay far beneath the surface. His life flowed on in the accustomed channels; diplomat, courtier, grand seigneur—he had no lack of employment. Only those with whom he dealt found the gray eyes less icily calm, his bearing more gentle. And with the change the king's love for him deepened.

Eight months after his visit to the château, St. Allien was called upon a mission to Russia. The day before leaving, he brought the king a document to sign. Reading it, Louis looked up to study the other's face incredulously.

"What are you doing, Noel?" he demanded. "You were serious, then, last winter?"

"'A Chartrès to remember,' sire," quoted St. Allien coolly.

He stayed in Russia three months, and carried his mission through triumphantly. Then his royal master added a line to an official letter:

"Come home for Christmas, Noel."

St. Allien obeyed.

"Only until dawn. Good-by, my cousin."

Out of the gay, excited turmoil of the streets, the merry crowds, the shifting lights of the *réveillon*, a gentleman ascended the wide steps of the Palais St. Allien and entered the brilliant hall. Through the gorgeous, jesting attendants—infected by the general joyousness—the majordomo advanced to receive him.

"Monsieur le Duc?"

"Pardon, monsieur, his highness is still with the king."

"I will wait for him; I am Monsieur de Chartrès."

"If monsieur will deign to follow me——"

The small study on the floor above evidently waited—like the visitor presently left in it—for the master's return. Tinted lamps sent their glow over carved and gilded leather, dull velvets and shining wood. On the pol-

ished table were scattered papers, writing-utensils of gold or bronze, crystal glasses of ink and sticks of sealing-wax, in bright disorder. As Chartrès took his seat the rich notes of an organ floated up from the chapel below.

It was past midnight when St. Allien entered, pausing after closing the door behind him. Just from the king's salon, his court dress of gleaming satin and lace was starred with the rainbow fire of jewels and gemmed orders, the very hand on the latch flashed with the great diamond set there by Catherine of Russia. Never had been more obvious the luxury detested by Chartrès; never had he detested it more than now.

"Christmas Eve," St. Allien said in his level voice. "You are welcome, my cousin."

"I have not come in friendliness," he retorted.

"None the less your visit is better than silence. Pray be seated; I am weary after weeks of forced travel."

"You do not appear so," Chartrès commented.

"Do I not?" St. Allien deliberately moved the rose-colored lamp nearer as he took his seat opposite the other.

Gray eyes crossed gray eyes, but Chartrès was in no mood to read the fatigue in the dark face.

"Once I told you, St. Allien," he stated harshly, "that I refused to hold my title from your bounty. Since then the debt has grown. You have tricked me again; you have made me eat your food, wear your garments, live on your charity for a year. A blind fool, I never guessed why debts owing me were suddenly paid, why my mortgaged fields were bought for three times their value —why fortune turned capricious and overwhelmed me. No doubt you laughed. But at the last you went too far; even I could not credit the king's tardy recollection of Chartrès de Chartrès. I investigated——"

St. Allien made neither denial nor defense, waiting quietly.

"I found behind it all, you. I recalled your boast that in the future I would be forced to walk your path as in the past. 'A Chartrès to remember.' I tell you I stifle with hate of you, I sicken at the thought you live. You delighted in compelling me to owe you gratitude."

"No, never. There is no place for gratitude between us. I gave back that of which you were robbed through my house."

Chartrès leaned nearer, savage with rage at the other's calm.

"Last year you refused to fight me; to-night one of us must leave the other free to commence the new year. As my grandfather did yours, I challenge you to play at cards with me. If you win, I engage to die before dawn; if I win, you keep the same promise. Life for life—are you afraid, Noel de Chartrès?"

St. Allien lifted his eyes, something lightened curiously across his face.

"When you last suggested that I was afraid, my cousin, I had—as you say—work to do. Now it is completed and we meet in my house instead of yours. I will play with you."

He rang a bell, and gave a brief direction to the servant who appeared.

Flushed, intent, Chartrès watched the bringing of a small table, the arrival of the packs of cards on their enameled tray and the salver of fragile goblets and decanters placed attentively on the near-by desk. When they were again alone, St. Allien rose courteously and offered a chair at the card-table.

"You will choose the cards, my cousin; you appreciate that there has been no opportunity to tamper with them? Or do you trust our blood so far? Permit me to fill your glass—— Oh, have no hesitation; I have eaten your bread. And, what do we play?"

In spite of himself the atmosphere, the companionship, brought Chartrès to stinging consciousness of his life-long isolation from a world as much his as St. Allien's. And the loneliness did not make him more gentle.

"The old game was lansquenet," he replied coldly.

"Lansquenet, then." St. Allien raised the frail lilylike goblet. "To the victor, my cousin."

"*Gloria in excelsis*——" pealed the

sweet high boyish voices from the chapel as Chartrès drank the toast. "*Gloria* in——"

They commenced the game.

From the streets drifted echoes of the merriment, faint laughter and song. Steadily the organ stepped through the measured chords, and over it rose the soaring chant. In the room were only the light rustle of the cards, the necessary movements of the players.

Suddenly Chartrès caught his breath sharply. St. Allien carefully pushed the last trick toward him and leaned back.

"We are unfortunate at lansquenet, we others," he remarked with nonchalance. "Pardon, I am a forgetful host; let me fill your glass."

But Chartrès' brusk recoil sent the goblet crashing to the floor.

"You will pay?" he cried. "You will pay?"

The other raised his eyebrows.

"You still are not careful in your choice of expressions, my cousin. Naturally I will pay. And accept my thanks for a new sensation; your substitute for a duel is charming."

Chartrès rose unsteadily and moved to the door as one whose errand has been accomplished.

"When you bring mademoiselle here to live," St. Allien's voice detained him.

Chartrès wheeled about.

"I? Here?"

"Why not? As my only kinsman, tomorrow you will be Duc de St. Allien. If you decide to live here, will you tell mademoiselle that I leave this room as especially hers? Ah, and will you consider our agreement fulfilled if I—depart—at sunrise? I have a fancy to keep the *réveillon*."

Chartrès stared at the man who smiled at him from the armchair; all his life there were times when he saw the somberly rich room, the table strewn with scattered cards, St. Allien in his splendor of white and gold under the rose-colored lamps.

"Your fortune, never," he said between his set teeth. "I wanted your life, no more. At sunrise—when you will; another day——"

"Thank you; only until dawn. Good-by, my cousin."

A woman in the street sent up the old Christmas call exultantly:

"*Noël! Noël! Noël! Réjouissons!*"

Alone at last, St. Allien let his head sink against the chair-back; even Chartrès might have admitted the weariness in his face then. But he made no other sign. After a while he rose and went to the writing-table.

There were so many letters to write, arrangements to make; and the Russian affair must be placed in the king's hands. The hours slipped all too rapidly.

The music rose and fell, alternated by periods of silence, Père Cyprian's voice not penetrating here. St. Allien wrote steadily, methodically addressing and sealing each completed letter. At last a dimness crept through the room, the lamps paled reluctantly before the pearl-gray dawn. He looked up, signed and sealed the last letter; then drew a sheet of paper to him and wrote one word:

"Flavienne."

For a long time he gazed at it, until his head drooped to his folded arms in a fierce impotent rebellion and conflict that might have contented Chartrès himself.

A faint cold pink tinged the east, a tiny wind awoke and brushed happily past the ice-fringed windows. Some one knocked at the door—a timid, eager knock.

"Enter," he called, recovering himself with some impatience.

The light footfall was strange to his house, the slight figure the guest of many dreams.

"Noel," breathed the girl on the threshold, her black riding-cloak falling back.

St. Allien sprang forward with a great cry and caught her to him.

"Flavienne! You, once more, once more!"

The brilliant gray eyes lay open to the hunger of his, the delicate glowing face did not turn from his caress.

"'A Chartrès to remember,'" she sighed. "I never feared you would for-

get. Armand rode to Paris —to kill you, he said. I followed so fast, so secretly, to reach you in time. Ah, to find you safe, after frantic days and nights on the road with only old François for help! I was afraid——"

He held her closer, his face a white glory in the growing light; the lesson finally learned.

"You did that for me? Flavienne, I can trust the God who lets me see you again; ten minutes ago I doubted all."

"Armand has been here? Noel, you are not to fight with him, he has not forced a duel?"

"No, no; we quarrel no more. Be satisfied; we have done our parts, you and I; the rest is no care of ours. Where I go, you will come."

Exhausted, she lay passively in his arms. St. Allien touched his lips to the bronze hair shaken from its bonds and glanced at the flushing sky.

"Heart of my heart, did you come here alone?"

"Yes. Your sleepy servants let me pass from sheer astonishment."

"Dear, but this whispering city must never guess that you came to me so. Forgive me if I think of you carefully. Down-stairs is my chapel; will you let me place you in Père Cyprian's charge?"

"I will do as you wish. But I must go back to Armand; I cannot marry you against his will, Noel."

"You will go back to Armand," he assented sadly. "Your place is there, dear love. And I must take you to Père Cyprian now; I must keep an appointment before sunrise."

"Not with Armand?"

"My Flavienne, to pay a debt at cards."

Smiling, she drew herself from him.

As he turned that way Flavienne flashed across the threshold.

"Let me look at you, Monsieur le Duc! You have scarcely allowed me to see you. Ah," she caught her breath luxuriously, "you are superb! One keeps the *réveillon* so splendidly, here?"

He made no answer, and her eyes reveled in him as he opened the little door to the chapel stairs. Already the radiant horizon quivered with hints of coming gold, but he paused for a moment.

"There is something else. I promised you a ring instead of the unfit one of our betrothal. Ever since my return to Paris I have carried this."

He took her hand and put over the sullen ruby a band of sapphires frigidly azure and pure.

"Blue for hope," he said, and kissed her before they descended the stairs.

When he returned the room was a sea of vivid color. He went straight to the desk and took from a drawer one of those Italian keys of death; a fairylike, slender stiletto whose steel glinted Damascus violet, whose hilt was airily chased and fluted by some forgotten Cellini.

"*Gloria, Gloria*——" sang the fervent choir.

"'Because it was Christmas day, we called you Noel,'" murmured St. Allien, turning to the window.

The first shaft shot arrowlike through billows of rose and purple. His eyes on it, St. Allien pushed aside the satin and lace above his heart.

The knock that crashed against the door was less a knock than a furious effort to find the latch.

"One does not enter," St. Allien forbade sternly.

The answer was between a cry and a sob; Chartrès flung himself across the room, whiter than the other as the door fell shut behind.

"St. Allien!" he gasped. "St. Allien!"

And taking in all the significance of the other's attitude, he grasped at the back of a chair.

"It was time—time——"

"You are exacting, my cousin," St. Allien said coldly. "The sun is not yet up and I pay. Have the goodness to leave me."

"No. I thought I hated you, but not this way. If it had been a duel—— St. Allien, put down that devil's toy and live."

But St. Allien made no move to lay aside the stiletto.

"Once you refused to owe your title to my justice," he answered. "I am no less unwilling to owe my life to your pity, cousin. Have the goodness to retire: I have the right to your absence."

Chartrès put out a shaking hand of protest.

"You refuse me? You will carry it out?"

"Yes."

"Never, never! I cannot bear it, St. Allien."

"I do not know that your emotions concern me. You forced this instead of the peace I offered. The sun is rising; unless you desire to witness the affair you had better go."

"I abandon the wager; live!"

"To have you tell me a third time that I am afraid?" His chill smile glanced out. "I have my pride also, Chartrès. Now go!"

"You will not hear me say it." He sprang across and seized the other's wrist as the first level ray darted into the room. "St. Allien, think——"

St. Allien's reply was a swift movement that sent the less strong Chartrès staggering from him.

"When you won my life, you won no other right," he retorted sternly. "And lower your voice. I give you the last opportunity to go."

Too late he had remembered the unsecured door to the chapel; as he turned that way Flavienne flashed across the threshold.

"Armand," she panted, "Armand, here!"

Before either man could prevent, her clairvoyant eyes swept the scene; the desk with its piled letters, the card-strewn table, Chartrès' set face, and lastly the thing in St. Allien's hand.

"'A debt at cards,'" she repeated. "Noel, not that, not alone—take me with——"

St. Allien reached her barely in time as she swayed forward, and carried her to a couch.

"This is your fault," he flung fiercely at Chartrès. "Now take her from here before she revives or I will ring for my servants and have you removed forcibly. Beloved of mine," he bent his head to the lovely colorless face, his own lashes wet.

Chartrès lifted the stiletto from the ground where it had fallen and threw it into the hearth, then faced the other across Flavienne's couch.

"Take the truth, then," he said. "St. Allien, I did not try to save you from pity, but because I wanted you. What do you know of a life like mine, its loneliness, its bitterness?

"That morning when we met in the forest your glance scorched me with

thirst for your friendship, for companionship of yours, not knowing who you were. But the feud was old, and we had suffered; I hated Chartrès de St. Allien. All this past year I have lashed the hatred awake, hugged and exaggerated every grievance, blinding myself. Last night I could have killed you, I never dreamed of not claiming the forfeit."

"That would have been a game hardly to be forgiven, my cousin."

"Ah, yet you, winning, did not intend to claim it of me; I read it in your eyes," Chartrès retorted keenly. "But I meant you to pay. The hours before dawn taught me! I tried then to save you and still keep my secret. Now even that is yours. St. Allien, I love you as Flavienne loves. I ask nothing of you, use the knowledge as you will, but live."

Gray eyes crossed gray eyes once more; slowly the old glints shriveled and sank away, leaving clearness and love for the new.

"After all, the blood calls, Armand," and St. Allien wearily and tenderly, and clasped the hand held out to him as Flavienne raised her lashes.

HE hoped to rouse the sleeping world
With sword's or pen's great undertaking,
To sound alarm against the wrong,
Mankind to valiant deeds awaking.
But failing these, he still succeeds,
For now alarm-clocks he is making!

WHEN ma would know May's lover's aim,
She takes the man apart
And pins him down, to thus dissect
The purpose of his heart.

WHEN Grace and Donald roamed the fields
He thought himself in clover;
But when they sailed, she seemed to feel
That she must damp his ardent zeal,
And so she threw him over.

—CAMILLA J. KNIGHT.